
TOP SECRET
lol not really
GRAVITY FALLS
10 YEARS LATER
Thanks for the memories!

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Gravity Falls 10 Years Later

A Fandom Charity Zine

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When Gravity Falls first aired in June of 2012, none of us could have predicted the amazing community of fans that followed. Since its airing, we've done some incredible things together. We've shared our theories, cracked secret codes, created art and writing, solved Cipher Hunt, and donated thousands of dollars through fan projects and events run by the Gravity Falls team.

Needless to say, it's been a good ten years. Making our return a decade later to create this charity zine is a testament to the long standing power of fandom.

We'd like to extend our thanks to the *10 Years Later* contributors for all of their hard work and passion. This project looks amazing and you have so much to be proud of.

We'd also like to thank all the fans— you are the magic of Gravity Falls. A community is only as strong as the people within it. We couldn't have done this without your excitement and support.

And finally, a huge thanks to Alex Hirsch and the entire cast and crew behind this amazing show. Your work has left an immense impact on the world and on us. Thank you for everything.

Stay Weird,
The Mod Team


LOVE THESE GUYS!!
REVENGE!
>:)



Home
By NovelistServant

"… coasting south by the end of April, we can cross the Canal and sail along California, arriving back at Oregon just in time for the first day of summer."

Stan laid his fishing pole down on the table and picked up a sheet of paper, an eyebrow raised as a relaxed, impressed look decorated his aged face. "Wow, you thought of everything, Sixer." He said sarcastically, as if Ford overthinking was something new.

The table was littered with Ford's new journal (a green book with a golden sailboat on the front), a fishing pole, maps and documents and markers and pens and pencils galore, all enough to make anyone dizzy, but with Ford's brilliant mind it may as well be a tidy folder.

Ford shrugged as he began to roll up a map. "I would hate to disappoint them."

Stan gave him a firm look and was about to lightly insult him the way brothers do, but he caught the way Ford looked at the hanging photograph of their niece and nephew. Stan decided to take a more gentle approach, setting the paper in his hand back down on the table and gently elbowing his twin, wearing a soft smile.

"Hey, don't sweat it. Those kids love you and want you to be happy, and if sailing is what'll do it then they want you to do it." He decided to ignore the gnawing feeling in his gut, that tiny bit of doubt, that Ford didn't want to do this.

Ford smiled up at his brother. "I know, and I am beyond grateful you agreed to sail with me, and I'm happier now than I've ever been in my life, but I still miss them and want to see them when I promised I would."

"I get it." Stan said and averted his eyes to the picture again. "I miss 'em, too."

They were both silent for a moment, enjoying the blissful atmosphere but just being in each other's presence, the peaceful sounds of a calm ocean splashing the boat, and Stan cleared his chest like the old man he was and snagged his fishing pole off the table. "You coming or do I gotta catch dinner by myself?"

Ford smiled, deciding to clear off the table while Stan cooked the fish, and he walked outside, grabbing the spare fishing pole off the wall on his way out into the crisp, sea-salty air.

——?——

S: Good luck today kids! Sorry we can't make it.

M: It's okay! We understand! I just can't wait for it to be over so we can head home!

F: We're right on course! We should be there a day before you two are scheduled to arrive.

D: Cool! Can't wait to see you guys! We missed you.

S: Missed you too. Mabel sweetie, send pics of your graduation for your Grunkle Stan!

D: no

M: YES!

~photos sent~

S: HAHAHAHA! It's Poindexter Jr.!

F: I think Dipper wears it better.

M: Mom made him wear it.

S: Thank you, Mrs. Pines!

——?——

Mabel toyed with her champagne glass half-full of sparkling white grape juice, something friendly for the underage folks and Soos. Music played like it had for the last hour and a half, the reception getting comfortable, guests still partying but not as hard as they were when the bride and groom entered the vast room. Soos and Melody were slow dancing in their wedding attires, holding each other and enjoying the accomplishment of swearing to love each other forever.

The teenager was thrilled for her friends and so happy her dream couple had taken such a huge step, but now that her adrenaline was all dried up and her energy was running low, the self-pity in her gut was more noticeable. And she hated feeling like this.

She had been on a handful of dates with this one guy during her freshman year of high school, but she ended things when she found out he was texting another girl; not really cheating, but it didn't feel right and honestly that wasn't the only red flag. That had been two months ago, and Mabel was mostly over it, but dang it did she wish she wasn't alone. She knew she was young, she knew she shouldn't feel this way on such a special day—she was even mad at herself for being sad and lonely—but dang it did she really wish someone would dance with her.

Someone tapped her on the shoulder. Mabel forced a smile and looked up, but her smile turned genuine when she saw her great-uncle smiling down at her; her smile dropped for a second when he extended a hand.

"Can an old fart dance with his favorite niece?" Stan asked cheekily.

Mabel giggled and took his hand, walking with him out onto the dance floor. The song was slow and peaceful, so rather than a happy jig that the energetic twins would have normally done, Stan held Mabel close to his chest and they swayed to the music, an extra-special hug.

Neither of them said a word for a long time. Mabel was too hypnotized by the sound of Stan's gentle heart beating to speak, and Stan was way too happy to use his quick mouth. Shocker.

But Mabel pulled herself from her trance as a thought came to mind. "Grunkle Stan,"

"Hm?"

"When I get married, I want you to walk me down the aisle."

Stan's throat tightened and formed a lump, his body came to a stop, pausing the dance, and his vision was clouded as his mind went elsewhere. Potentially the highest honor any girl can give to a parental figure, and Mabel had reserved it for him? Stan parted his lips to ask if she wasn't sure she wanted her dad to walk her to her groom, but the way she squeezed him and kept close, the way she relaxed in his arms, the way she smiled peacefully, trusting him completely like she always did, no matter what, Stan's uncertainty was slayed.

So he swallowed down the lump in his throat and steadily led them back into a slow dance. "Okay, pumpkin."

——?——

"FOOOOOOOOOOOOOORD!"

The aged scientist fell out of his chair, jumping up from fear and losing his footing, hitting his cleft chin on the table and making his teeth chatter. He rubbed his aching jaw and scurried up to his feet, a hand to the gun hanging off his belt, and as he kicked down the door to the main area of the boat's cabin, he belted, "What's the matter?! What's attacking?!"

"What? Nothin'." Stan said, shoving a sheet of paper and a photograph to his face. "Look!"

The desire to cuss his brother out died as he looked at the small picture and dared not to jump to conclusions, but as his eyes moved to the letter and he read the message, his hypothesis was proven correct. Ford grinned and punched Stan's shoulder. "Stanley! Congratulations!"

Stan rubbed the back of his neck, ignoring his hot face and huge grin that displayed all his false teeth. "Guess we gotta cancel our plans to see Russia, huh?"

"Of course!" Ford said, as if the idea of doing anything but was ludicrous. "Let me see…" He moved past his brother to reread some maps and plans. "… if we… Well, keep in mind that we have roughly seven months to return home. Honestly, as long as we turned around at the islands between the Laptev and East Siberian Sea, we should return in plenty of time."

"Okay, as long as we don't miss it. I'd rather lose my right arm than miss it."

——?——

Mabel looked out into the sea of people one last time. She knew it was fruitless; her graduating class was huge and there were a lot of people in the football stands, and she knew better than to hope that they would make it. It was too risky. Still, Mabel had always been a dreamer, always the one to hope, and always willing to get nipped in the butt for it.

Her brother, who stood right behind her, just a few steps down, stole her hand and squeezed it.

“Mabel Pines.”

The crowd applauded politely, a pair of parents clapping more enthusiastically than the other adults and her favorite classmates clapping and cheering for her. She was lucky to make a good sum of friends in high school, befriending nearly everyone in her numerous classes, resulting in a nice loud applause for when she walked across the stage and accepted her diploma.

“Mason Pines.”

With several strands of fancy rope dressed around his neck loosely, Dipper walked across the stage. His parents kept their applause consistent, his Robotics team and fellow theater geeks clapping and cheering for him as he followed his sister’s footsteps.

Both of them were proud and relieved when the moment was over, but dang it. They wish their great-uncles had been there.

——?——

The old men stared at the quiet football field with wide, horrified eyes. All their hard work, all their efforts, had been for nothing. If only they had planned to leave a few days early. If only they had been clever enough to avoid the storm. If only they had never been out at sea in the first place.

No! No, they couldn’t think like that. They didn’t think like that. Not really. Maybe for a moment, in the midst of anger, sadness, disappointment, and a sinking feeling of missing two of their favorite people in the whole world, they could entertain the notion that they didn’t want to be out at sea, but they both knew it was a lie the moment their subconscious formed the idea.

Still, there were only a few moments in which both Ford and Stan felt like such failures, and this was definitely one of them.

Stan let his head fall forward, his forehead landing on the steering wheel with a dull thud. Ford stared out his window, out at the stadium’s entrance, and his old eyes finally seemed well adjusted to the darkness, because he was finally aware of two figures sitting on the curb, under the lamplight.

“Stanley,”

Stan slowly looked up at his twin and followed his eyes, at first completely lost, but then it was like someone had lit the lighthouse in his haunted mind. The retired conman scurried out of his car and Ford also stood, both staring at the high school graduates, who simultaneously stood, making disconsolate smiles.

“We wanted you guys to see us in our cap-n-gowns.” Mabel elaborated. “Pretty cool, huh?”

Stan bit his lip at seeing his two little knuckleheads all grown up. Dipper with his peach fuzz and proof of beyond academic achievement, and Mabel with her beautiful long hair and homemade pins keeping her locks out of her shining eyes. With adrenaline aiding his aching, old body, Stan slid over the front of his car, ran to his kids, and grasped them with his beefy arms, holding them tightly and squeezing his eyes shut in a feeble (and failed) attempt to keep tears away.

Ford was right behind him, hugging his family proudly, apologetic words, praises, greetings on his tongue, but his lips failed him. That was okay. Words were unnecessary.

——?——

The kids were well-settled into their dorm rooms at college, it being a good week since the long, emotional, exhausting day, giving the Mystery Shack a quiet atmosphere, until it was disturbed by a crying three-year-old.

“NO! POP-POP! POP-POP!”

Stan pressed his mouth shut, allowing Ford to guide him by the shoulder to the car. “We’ll see you all very soon! Take care, Soos! Bye, Jacob!”

“POP-POP! POP-POP!”

"Do you want me to drive?" Ford asked quietly.

Stan cleared his throat and ruffed. "No. M'fine. Get in the car."

Soos chuckled feebly and waved them goodbye before finally taking his son inside, deciding it wasn't worth watching them leave this time.

Stan started the engine and stubbornly wiped at his eyes, an excuse of dust at the ready, as he mumbled, "When's it gonna get easier, huh?"

Ford chuckled as he watched Gravity Falls zoom behind him, his gut instinct that their sailing may be short-lived still present, and he was becoming more and more okay with that.

——?——

"... with all the Pal robots safely disposed of and all of the destroyed architecture rebuilt, it's safe to say that we can put that terrifying robot apocalypse behind us. The Mitchell family will receive their fifth award for saving the world tomorrow night, just in time for their kids to start the new school year, and for their dog Monchi to make it to his grooming session with Noodles. And now Tom with the weather. Tom?"

"It's gonna rain!"

"Thank you, Tom."

Ford turned off the TV and chuckled, shaking his head. "When are we going to get our five awards for stopping an apocalypse?"

"You mean 'when am *I* gonna get my five awards for stopping an apocalypse.'"

The old men both laughed peacefully at the subject. If you can't casually joke about the world nearly ending ten years after the traumatizing event, you haven't recovered successfully.

Stan went back to looking at his photo album, a birthday gift from Mabel last year. The book was filled to the brim with pictures of not only Ford and Stan sailing, but of Soos and Melody's wedding, the day Jacob was born, graduations, birthdays, and just simple moments of being together.

As much as he didn't want to, he was ready to have the conversation with Ford they had started loosely in the past. Guesses and theories of retirement. Something about moving back into the Shack, something about docking the boat at the lake and staying on the Stan O' War, something about a lake house. Never a real plan, never a real timeline, because they were happy here and happy now, and Stan still was, but he was ready to start a new adventure. He just really hoped Ford was in the same boat.

"Stanford,"

He looked at him, and simultaneously they knew what the other had to say. Call it Twin-Telepathy. Call it simply knowing each other that well. Call it wishful thinking? Nah, this was certain. Ford and Stan both smiled peacefully, a little sad to be finishing this chapter, but even more excited to start a new one, and never forgetting and beyond grateful that they would always have each other.

After ten years of sailing, they were ready to come home. For good this time.


DR
CRACKF
SUPE
ROCKE
BOOST


PLR
-22

Mabel Pines and the Cool Hair Crew

by mabelpagepines

No one else seemed to notice how hot it was the summer Mabel turned twenty-three.

That was the only explanation she could think of for everyone asking why she didn't wear one of her trademark sweaters every day. She'd only packed a few of them for when it got late in the season and the temperature started to drop at night. The rest of the time she wore clothes that, by her previous standards, were fairly plain. A knit tank top, jean shorts, the works. She would accent them with big tacky jewelry or a giant scrunchie holding up her way too thick hair, but that wasn't enough for some.

At the moment, it was too much for her. Not because she didn't like what she was wearing, but because the oversized teal geometric earrings weighed her down as she lied in bed. She took them off and dropped them in her suitcase, which was still open on the floor. She traced the carved flower on her headboard with her finger and listened to the muffled music, making a game of trying to identify the song playing downstairs.

She stared up at the faded Sev'ral Timez poster stuck on the wall with a few extra layers of packing tape that couldn't quite hide the ripped corners. The attic had already been decorated when she and Dipper arrived that morning. Dipper's side with old books and relics that Ford had found in storage, Mabel's side with hot pink throw pillows and a pile of newly bought stuffed animals. Dipper was soon to make a dent in the pile of books on the nightstand, borrowed from Ford's lab and full of knowledge that would probably give him an unfair advantage against the other students in his Master's program come fall. Mabel had already thrown at least half the stuffed animals under the bed.

Drive Over Me. That was the song the others were listening to downstairs. It was by some boy band that had cropped up a few years ago that everyone had expected her to love. Their lyrics were meaningless, which would have been fine from a band that was more self-aware. These guys thought they were above it all and filled their songs with weird, overcomplicated metaphors.

Embrace it or don't, she thought.

A snort came from under her bed. She hung upside down off the side for a look at Waddles, who had wedged his way into the sprawling pile of plushies. She stared intently at his chubby face, frowning and narrowing her eyes.

"You are the cutest thing that has ever lived," she said. "In any dimension." She heard the door open.

"Did one of those little golf ball people get under your bed again?" Pacifica said, grabbing a mini golf club from the set that had been left leaning against the wall. "I'll take care of it."

Mabel turned around, still upside down. "No, Waddles is just being adorable again." He scooted forward and started chewing on a piece of her hair that hung in front of him.

Pacifica set the club back in place and crossed her arms. "Well, I still think you should start leaving traps down there. I've caught four of them in the last two weeks sneaking into my room to seek revenge or whatever." She walked further into the room and sat down on Dipper's bed.

"What are you doing up here?" Mabel asked.

"Party got boring," she said. "Can I hang out with you?"

"Duh. This is the designated girl-time hangout spot."

Pacifica smiled. “Cool.”

The golf clubs slipped and clattered on the floor. The sound made Mabel spring upright, which allowed Waddles to completely tear off the hair in his mouth. Mabel rubbed the back of her head and groaned.

“Oh my gosh,” said Pacifica, and glanced at the club she’d placed so haphazardly. “Are you okay? I’m so sorry –”

“It’s fine,” said Mabel. She flipped her hair so the front section covered the damage. “No one’ll notice.”

Wendy came sauntering in with a bucket in one hand and hair clippers in the other. “’Course not,” she said, and her face turned grave. “But we’ll all know.”

Pacifica furrowed her brow. “Did you just come up here to shave it off?”

Wendy set the bucket on the floor and plugged in the clippers. “Oh, no. Freaky coincidence.” She held up the clippers. “These are for me.” She leaned her shoulder-length red hair over the bucket and started shaving.

Mabel tilted her head. “So, uh, why are you shaving your head in here?”

“Too loud downstairs. Gotta focus. Don’t worry, I’ll clean up anything that falls out.”

“Okay,” said Pacifica. “But why are you *shaving your head*?”

“Cuz it’s like, ninety-nine degrees outside. What, you two aren’t miserable with all that sticking to your neck?” She gestured at Pacifica’s long blonde hair, the top layer up in a ponytail and the brownish roots grown halfway down her head.

“Ugh, finally,” said Mabel. “It’s like nobody else can tell how hot it is!”

“Someone’s really upset about the weather,” said Wendy.

“Everyone’s acting like it’s weird for me to wear a tank top once in a while, just cuz I used to wear sweaters all the time!” She threw her arms up. “Like that wasn’t a literal decade ago.”

“I know what you mean,” said Pacifica, rolling her eyes. “Jenny and Tiffany still think I’m their millionaire friend who’s above everything.”

Wendy finished the right side of her head and turned to the left. “Yeah, I think that’s a little different, Northwest.”

“No, like, they think they can kiss up to me and I’ll get them whatever they want, and we can all sit around and act like we’re better than everybody. I kept trying to tell them I didn’t want that, but they never listened.” She sat back against the wall. “Now I just ignore their texts and hope they get the hint someday.”

“I still have a Pony Heist poster in my room in California,” said Mabel. “I hate looking at it now.”

Wendy switched the clippers off and sat cross-legged on the floor. “Whoa, when did that happen?”

Mabel sighed. “I don’t know. After I graduated, I came home and it felt like I was back in middle school, and I really don’t want to be anymore.” She lied back on her pillow. “But everyone wants me the way I was back then, when I was little and quirky and adorable.”

“Yeah,” said Pacifica, casting her eyes down. “When I was a kid, my parents could’ve replaced me with a life-size dress-up doll and I

doubt anyone would've noticed."

Wendy furrowed her brow. "Life-size dress-up doll?"

"You know," Pacifica said with a shrug. "Those dolls that were like, three feet tall, so you could wear the dresses they came with."

The room went quiet.

"Oh, like *that's* the weirdest thing about any of our childhoods."

"I thought you were cool with your parents now," said Wendy, cleaning out some hair stuck in the blades.

Pacifica arched an eyebrow. "Yeah, they're trying out the whole 'supportive' thing, but I can tell they want me to go back to color-coordinating all my outfits before bed and laughing along while they make fun of poor people. Instead I grew up and started forming opinions."

Mabel turned her head and smiled at her. "You can always come here and make fun of rich people with us," she said.

Pacifica chuckled. "I'd like that."

Mabel rolled over. "I don't know if it's actually hit my family that I'm an adult now. I mean, look at this wall!" She pointed at the Sev'ral Timez poster and cat pictures posted above her.

"What," said Pacifica. "You don't like cats anymore?"

Mabel sat up. "Hey, I'll always love cats." She got up from the bed and pulled a pink sparkly ball of yarn out of her suitcase. "And knitting, and glitter. I just want to be able to put the sweaters away when it's hot out. Or have a chill night once in a while, or hang up pictures of my friends. Instead I've got clone faces watching me while I sleep." She nodded toward the wide eyes and frosted tips looming over her bed.
"Wanna rip it up?" said Wendy.

"Stan and Soos did all the decorating," said Mabel. "They were so proud of it; I don't want to hurt their feelings."

Waddles started coughing under the bed, and after a moment hacked up Mabel's hair. Wendy held up the clippers and switched them on so they made a buzzing sound.

"I think we can find a compromise."

—— ? ——

The clippers pushed the last tiny pieces of brown hair to the floor. Wendy, now bald, held Mabel steady while Pacifica finished the crude heart design on Mabel's head. They led her to the full-length mirror and she flipped her half-shaved hair to the opposite side, the one Waddles had torn earlier. He was now asleep in a red and brown nest on the floor. Mabel giggled as her hair fell back into place so the heart was visible again.

Wendy smirked. "Sure you don't wanna get in on this, Northwest?"

"Nah," said Pacifica, raking her fingers through a length of her own hair. "I actually like mine the way it is."

"Your parents hate the roots, don't they?"

"Drives them up the wall."

"How ya feelin', Mabel?"

"Pretty good," she said, muffled by her remaining hair now hanging in front of her face.

She parted it with her hands and peeked out when she felt a cold breeze come from the doorway.

Dipper walked in rubbing his arms. "Hey, Mabel, can I borrow – whoa." He stopped behind her and his eyes widened. Mabel flipped her hair back. "You guys have only been up here for like, an hour. What did I miss?"

"Just the inaugural meeting of the Cool Hair Crew," she said, pushing some flyaway strands out of her face.

He shut the door and chuckled. "Okay then. Hey, can I borrow one of your sweaters? Soos cranked the AC trying to make an 'eternal winter' exhibit."

Mabel started brushing through to fix the mess from swinging her hair in every direction. "Have at it, bro-bro."

He opened the window, dug through her suitcase and pulled out a sweater with an elephant face on it, complete with a trunk made of yarn sticking out of the middle. Mabel had knitted it in high school. Some pieces were fraying, and it was just a smidge too small on Dipper.

Wendy seemed to eye him suspiciously as he wriggled into it, his back to the window.

"What?" he asked, half a second before realizing she was looking behind him.

"Are those birds, or –"

He turned around just as a swarm of Lilliputtians jumped at him. A blue one grabbed hold of the yarn trunk and pulled Dipper through the window. He shrieked as they carried him off.

A distant *"Franz will have his day!"* rang out, and the girls shared a sideways glance.

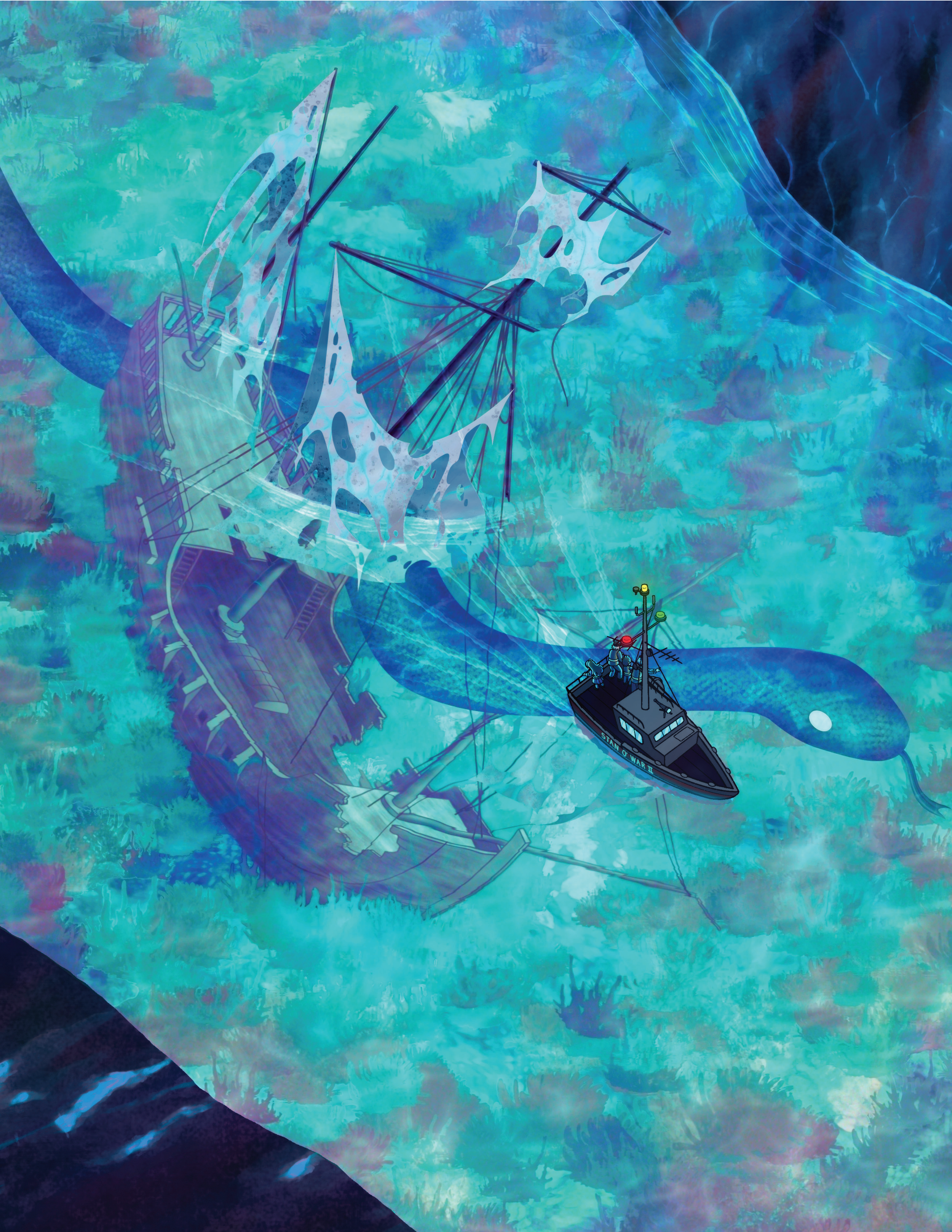
"Some people never change," said Pacifica. Wendy smiled and shook her head.

Mabel picked up the clubs off the floor and passed them out. She and Pacifica each took one. Wendy took two and held one up in each hand.

"Cool Hair Crew rescue mission!" Mabel shouted.

They touched the ends of their clubs together in the air before climbing out the window and down the side of the house after the kidnappers.


03
22


STAN O' WAR II

Once More Unto the Breach
by clockheartedcrocodile

The first thing to go is the map. The big guy snaps a lighter—Taj Mahal stamped on the case, typical tourist tat, and Stan would know—and torches it with a flick of the wrist. Throws the cinders off the side of the boat. Then goes their hiking gear, the SPF 50, and Ford's wallet, but not before the little guy checks his driver's license and finds that it expired in the 80's, and is also only valid in space.

"Guess you haven't been to the DMV in a while, eh?" says Stan. His arms are up, just like Ford's, and his back is against the wall. Unlike Ford, Stan has most of the map scrawled on his arm in ballpoint pen. He knew these bozos were bad news from the minute he looked at them. Stan could always smell a con artist. Ford never could.

"You'll pay for this!" says Ford through gritted teeth. "Who are you working for? The Soviet Union?"

"Nah, buddy," says the little guy. He waggles the end of his gun and the big guy grips Stan and Ford by the scruffs, steers them to the railing, makes them look. "We work for nobody but ourselves."

The big guy throws them over. Ford hits the water first, Stan second, and by the time the piranhas begin to swarm, the Stan o'War II is already speeding away.

Ford makes it to the shore first, clawing his way up onto the bank of vegetation and flotsam. He kicks a piranha off his heel and throws a vine to Stan. Stan drags himself up and out, and the two of them lie there on the jungle floor, catching their breath.

"Those weren't piranhas," Ford says at last, still breathing hard, red in the face. "Piranhas aren't native to this region."

"They sure bit like 'em," says Stan. He squints up at the sun filtering through the tangled trees. "You picked a couple of real keepers there, Sixer."

Ford huffs a little sigh that might be a laugh. "You know," he says, "Bill once said to me, he said, 'do you know why I picked you over your brother? It's because you're the stupid twin.'"

They exchange weary smiles. Then they pick themselves up and look around. "Lucky for us," Stan grins, pulling his sleeve up, "those guys are outta luck. They're going the wrong—ah, cripes."

He stares down at the mess of smeared ink on his arm. Ford is inspecting the trees around them—the bending boughs, the strange whorls in the trunks, the drooping vines—and Stan stares mystified as Ford finally kneels in the muddy foliage and picks up a stray piranha, still weakly snapping its jaws.

"Just as I thought," Ford says grimly. "Not a piranha at all, but an ordinary river fish distorted by supernatural energy," He straightens up, wipes his six-fingered hands on his shirt and looks around him. "Look at those flowers. If they're from the family *Orchideae* then I'm a Gromflomite tax collector."

Stan doesn't know his flora from his phenomena so he lets Ford take the lead. No machetes without their knapsacks on them, so they force their way through the overgrowth with knees and elbows. Here a cluster of strange berries, there a tangle of translucent blue grass. Weird foliage, beating a weird trail through the riverside jungle.

It's a long hike and Stan's knees aren't what they used to be. These days his adventures are a package deal with all the aches and indignities of aging. He's not alone in that. Ford takes enough medication every morning to knock out an elephant.

They could've died back there, Stan realizes, as he shoulders his way roughly past a tree. It's not an unreasonable thought. Time was, that wouldn't have troubled him. After all, he'd died already. His mother cried at his funeral, but she still didn't recognize him when he hugged her and told her Stan was in a better place.

Some mother she'd turned out to be.

Stan had wanted to travel the world and ended up stuck in a small town in Oregon for most of his life. But now look at him. Following Ford through the jungle. As a kid he was always telling Ford to keep up. Then he was falling behind, miles behind, and Ford never looked back.

Ford is looking back now. He's holding an armful of vines aside so Stan can push through, and then he keeps pace with him, still leading the way. This, then, is what it means to be brothers. Stan walking faster for Ford, and Ford walking slower for Stan.

They're not exactly the stuff of legends. But here they are.

At last the trail of weird foliage leads them out under a thick canopy of branches. They're dripping with some sort of strange, spectral

filament. The trees overlook a small cave that's more like a sheltered hole in the ground. A luminescent glow bathes Ford's boots in blue light.

Sometimes Stan's afraid that sailing around the world won't be enough for his spacefaring brother anymore. But judging by the gleam of triumph in Ford's eyes, and the delighted grin he shoots over his shoulder before lowering himself down through the opening, he doesn't have anything to worry about.

It's a long, long way down, and it's not easy for a man of Stan's size. They work slowly, easing their way through the narrower gaps, spotting each other, silently grateful for the blue glow that lights their way. Ford's sweater snags on a sharp edge, but doesn't tear—that'll be the unicorn hair Mabel knitted into it, still visible as faint iridescent strands.

Stan swears. "Sixer," he says, an edge of panic in his voice. "The boat. The mirrors are on that boat."

The cavern is opening out ahead of them. Ford, just about to lower himself through, looks sharply up at Stan. "You're right, I—I completely forgot. Well, that's just great."

The mirrors are simple. Two-way, handheld, and not quite big enough for Dipper and Mabel to stick their heads through but big enough to pass homework sheets and little presents back and forth. As far as long distance tutoring options go, magic mirrors have worked out pretty well for them.

Unless, of course, they lose their mirror.

Stan is still swearing under his breath by the time he squeezes himself down through the last crevice and into the chamber below. The floor is spongy with phosphorescent fungi, and his boots squish when he walks on them.

Water is trickling down the far wall in thin rivulets, eroding the wall into strange, unearthly geometric patterns. Stan squints to try to see the source; there's a crack in the wall, just a little one, and it's from this that the water flows.

Ford is already standing by the wall, watching the strange water drip down and down. "This is it?" Stan mutters, coming to stand beside him, hands in his pockets and shoulders slouched. "This is the Fountain of Youth? Looks like a water feature."

Ford hushes him sharply, looking worried. He crouches, presses his ear to the ground. "Listen," he whispers. "Can you hear that?"

"Hmm?" Stan grunts. He's patting down his pockets, looking for one of Ford's sample vials. When he finds one, he leans over Ford and collects a few drops in it. Not much. Just enough. "Whassat?"

Ford springs to his feet and grabs Stan's arm. "That rumbling!" he cries, shaking Stan urgently. "It knows we're here!"

"It?"

"The source of the fountain! If we don't leave now—"

A deep fissure cracks open in the earth between them, emitting a huge, guttural roar, and Stan yells. Ford tugs him over the gap before it can widen further and the two of them sprint back the way they'd come, clambering hand over hand back up the cramped, narrow passageway they'd entered by. Stan's lungs fill with dust at every breath but the worst of it is Ford muttering nonstop behind him. Stan's never had a plan; it means he's good at acting under pressure. When Ford's plans fail, he panics.

The tunnel crumbles to pieces behind them, cutting it close enough that Ford almost loses a boot when they drag themselves out into the jungle and collapse, laughing and bleeding, on the ground outside. The vial is tucked snug against Stan's chest.

Thunder rumbles overhead, threatening to outpour a river of rain down on the jungle canopy. Stan and Ford hastily pull together a shelter at the base of a tree and huddle under it while the rain beats down in torrents, lashing against the broad, flat leaves that shelter them with a sound like a horse at a run.

Stan rolls the vial in the palm of his hand. They both sit there for a long moment, looking at it, with the rain falling down around them.

Second chances.

That fateful summer—and the summer after that, and the summer after that—those had been second chances. Bill's death had been a second chance. The nightlight of the universe had been turned on, and it was finally safe to go back to bed. But this . . . this is different. This is youth, and life.

Stan knows enough about his brother to know that it's not an easy choice. Ford is self-centered, sure, but he's finally learned how to be smart. Back in the day, Ford thought that if you made a mistake, that was it. You don't get another chance. Then here comes Stan, who gets to make mistakes—who can get by, somehow, on the strength of his own wit—and there's Ford. Ford doesn't get to make mistakes.

But Ford's older now, and wiser. So is Stan. The thin chip of ice in his heart at the thought of depending on Ford for friendship or money or family was beginning to melt. Slowly, sure, but it was.

"What do you say, Stan?" says Ford. His eyes are fixed on the vial in Stan's palm. "Once more unto the breach? A lifetime of treasure hunting?"

Stan closes his eyes. One more time around, without wasting a single minute. A chance to be young again. Ten, twenty, thirty more years of breaking hearts and the laws of physics.

He opens his eyes.

"Nah," says Stan. He pockets the vial. "It was never about the treasure hunting."

Ford squints up at the roof of their shelter. "When the rain lets up," he says with a small smile, "let's go steal our boat back."

Stan feels a fierce rush of pride swell in his heart. "Yeah, Sixer," he grins. "I'm with you all the way."


Schpog'22

Our Old Twin-Sized Beds

by bloomingtea

Stepping off the bus was almost like stepping back in time—except not that, because Mabel had time traveled, and it felt pretty different.

It felt like an old photo in a scrapbook. Starting to yellow, edges beginning to curl, glue on the back coming loose.

"Man, it's been ages," Dipper said as he joined Mabel on the sidewalk.

She craned her neck to look up at the towering trees. "Tell me about it."

Dipper was keeping the whole thing in the present. Mabel was sure that things would snap back into time when they got into town, where everyone else would be older and buildings would be different and businesses would have changed, but at the moment, the only thing keeping her from being twelve years old again was the fact that *Dipper* was very much not a twelve year old.

Dipper hauled his duffle bag onto his shoulder. "We should've driven."

"With what car?" Mabel asked.

He opened his mouth, shut it, and tugged his hat down lower over his eyes. "Let's go."

——?——

The Mystery Shack was both the same as the one that existed in Mabel's memories and also just different enough that she felt like she was in a parallel dimension. Even some of the same old merchandise was for sale, but in slightly different spots. It made for a weird experience. Like that prank where someone moved everything a few inches over to mess with you and see if you walk into a table.

The most drastic change was Soos, and Mabel mostly chalked that up to him having significantly more facial hair than the last time she saw him.

"Whoa, dudes!" Soos said when they walked in the door. "You two are like *adult* adults!"

"Yeah, well," Dipper rubbed the back of his neck. "That'll happen."

Mabel spun the greeting card rack. "*You're* an adult adult, Soos. You have a whole business, and we're unemployed."

"I dunno," Soos mused. "That's pretty adult."

Dipper grimaced. "Great talk, guys. Thanks."

"You two don't mind staying in the attic, do you?" Soos moved a box of eyeballs to the other side of the counter. "We still got time to get you a hotel room or something. Don't want you squished like sardines."

Mabel and Dipper exchanged a glance.

"Just like old times!" she chirped. "Nothing we can't handle!"

"As long as it's not leaking," Dipper added. "It'll probably be on par with school housing."

——?——

The attic was strangely un-dusty. There was some junk piled up in the corners and along the walls, but their beds were still there, and the floor was relatively open.

Dipper dropped his bag on the bed that had always been his because he got there before Mabel could take it to annoy him. "I think I might be too tall for this now."

"You didn't grow *that* much."

He gave her an offended look. "Mabel, I'm definitely too tall and buff and ripped to—"

She threw one of the folded sheets at him and hit him in the chest. “Then check already, loser.”

Dipper had not grown that much. But in his defense, it was a tight fit.

——?——

They promised to catch up with Soos later, either over dinner or after dinner or during breakfast or at some point during their stay. It’d be kind of hard not to with them living in what was effectively *his* house. Which was still such a weird thought in Mabel’s brain. Even though it had been true when they left Gravity Falls that summer, the Mystery Shack was never going to belong to anyone but Grunkle Stan in her mind.

Who they were now trying to find.

Their grunkles knew that they were in town, they’d timed it so it worked out that way, but Soos had no idea where Stan and Ford currently were. Mabel joked that it was another mystery to solve and Dipper rolled his eyes and grabbed a can of bug spray. If Mabel’s memory was right, and there was a high chance that it was kind of warped and muddied from time and weird magic, mosquitos weren’t too much of a problem during the day, but she wasn’t going to mess with Dipper’s carefully crafted prep routine. She let him spray her with a cloud of bug spray and then followed him out of the Mystery Shack and toward the general direction of the town.

Walking through the woods rose goosebumps on Mabel’s arms. She tried not to let her anxieties show, but frustratingly, Dipper knew all her tells. Or at least he did back in high school when stuff like this was worse.

It was a warm day and sunbeams shone through the gaps in the trees in a way that should’ve been wonderfully picturesque. It was a good day for a walk. It was a *nice* day. And there wasn’t anything she had to be scared of.

She tried to keep glancing over her shoulder to a minimum and make looking around seem casual and like she was enjoying nature or something. And definitely not looking for demonic triangles or other things that might want to kill her.

The nightmares were fewer, but that didn’t mean they were gone. Irrationally, Mabel still really hated that specific shade of yellow.

For some reason, the way fallen leaves crunched slightly under her boots made her skin crawl. She hopped up onto a rock and leapt from rock to roots, trying to keep her feet from touching the ground whenever possible. Like a game of the floor is lava with more trauma.

“We almost died here,” Dipper said out of nowhere. He waved a bee away from his face. “Like, a bunch of times.”

“On this rock?” Mabel tried to joke. She tapped it with her foot. “I’ve never seen this rock in my life.”

He didn’t even entertain her attempt at derailment. “There was a super high chance that we might’ve not gone back home after that summer.”

Mabel chewed on the bottom of her lip. “Yeah. I guess.”

“Do you think about it much?”

She tried not to. She *really* tried not to. Mostly because if she did think about it, she would start to spiral into guilt and what could’ve beens and what she should’ve dones, and it would all bury her alive.

Weirdly enough, it was tough to find a therapist who didn’t get very concerned about everything Mabel had to say. Or friends. So she’d stopped trying or kept it to the surface-level stuff.

And she hadn’t talked about it with Dipper since they graduated high school.

There had been some sort of unspoken pact they made, unintentional or not when they left for their separate colleges. Everything that happened in Gravity Falls was in the past, and they were in the present. They hadn’t visited since their freshman year of high school, they’d made as much sense of it all as they could, and it’d be pointless to spend the little time they had to speak to each other outside of school talking about things that didn’t even really exist outside of the town.

Not that they talked much about mundane things either.

Mabel tugged on a loose thread of her sweater. “You know how it is,” she said vaguely, knowing that Dipper did not, in fact, know how it was.

“Doesn’t feel real, does it?” Dipper asked as a squirrel ran across their path.

"What?" Mabel looked around. "This place? I don't know. It's like…" She knocked on the trunk of the nearest tree. "It's pretty solid."

Dipper gave her a look that was both unimpressed and slightly concerned. Because they both knew something *feeling* real, having tangible mass that they could touch, actually meant very little.

It was one of those things that made it difficult to convince Mabel what was and wasn't real. Other people could see the weird stuff in Gravity Falls. She wasn't hallucinating—usually.

"We've been back here before," Mabel said softly. "It's not like this is the first time."

"Yeah, but…" Dipper trailed off.

Mabel felt that *but* in her soul. That time had been easier. It had all still been pretty fresh. Easy to believe. She and Dipper hadn't shared that many looks yet where their eyes met and they both thought, 'Are we crazy?' It hadn't felt like a fever dream.

But it *had* been a long time since they were back here. A long time since they were twelve.

Mabel hopped off the rock. "Let's get out of here, I'm hungry."

——?——

The passage of time had always seemed kind of strange to Mabel. How things changed and how they stayed the same and how, despite it all, she often felt *outside* of time.

Sometimes, she wanted to blame that on everything that happened when she was twelve. Other times, she figured it was just part of being human.

She stood with her hands on her hips on the corner of Main Street and looked up and down the road, judging the buildings and businesses.

"Weird," she announced.

There was old mixed with new mixed with attempted repairs. It was another game of spot the difference, which was probably going to be most of her vacation.

Mabel and Dipper split the street—one down one side and one the other—poking their head inside each establishment to see if they could find their grunkles and also say hello to anyone who recognized them.

Which was a lot more people than Mabel expected. A lot more small talk about college and her future. A few asked about Waddles, and that was nice.

When she spotted Wendy in the window of Erik's Fountain Drinks, surprisingly and not so surprisingly still standing, Mabel waited until Dipper came out of the building he was investigating and waved him over.

"You're buying me a milkshake and fries," Mabel said to him as he followed her inside.

"What? Why?" Dipper protested.

"You owe me." She squinted at the menu. "Chocolate with extra whipped cream."

"For *what*?!"

Mabel ignored him. "Hey, Wendy!"

Wendy looked up from her burger with a start as Mabel made her way over. "Oh my god, you guys are here!" She stood and scooped the two of them up into a tight hug.

"In the flesh," Dipper said. "I'm not buying you a milkshake, Mabel."

"I totally forgot you two were arriving today," Wendy admitted. "Time, am I right?"

"You're right," Mabel agreed as Dipper nodded.

"I'll buy," Wendy said. "It's been, like, so long since I saw you not through a screen. Unless these things have gotten crazy high-def."

She poked Mabel's cheek.

Mabel snorted and slapped Wendy's finger away. "Nah, it's us. And you don't have to, we have to find our grunkles. Dipper can buy me a milkshake later."

"I'm *not* buying you a milkshake."

"Oh man, I'm wasting your time, aren't I?" Wendy asked.

"It hasn't even been a minute—" Dipper started to protest, but she held up her hand.

"No worries, you're gonna be here all week anyway. We can catch up, I can buy Mabel a milkshake. I'm pretty sure your grunkles are down by the lake—that's usually where you can find them whenever they come around."

"I feel dumb," Dipper said and Mabel elbowed him in the side.

Wendy snorted. "Not dumb." She handed Mabel a french fry. "Just not around often. Don't worry about it."

Dipper was definitely going to worry about it.

——?——

The lake smelled like fish.

"Smells like fish," Mabel said.

Dipper sighed and squinted at the water. "Did we tell them what time the bus was coming?"

"Can't remember." Mabel kicked the sand. "Probably? But buses are weird."

He hummed in agreement and shaded his eyes. "What Wendy said…"

"You're worried about it?"

"I'm worried about it."

Mabel followed his gaze and found her grunkles' boat. "I mean…I don't think anyone is mad that we weren't here more often. We don't *live* here."

"But it sorta felt like we belonged here that summer, didn't it?"

"Yeah. It did."

The boat changed directions. They must have seen Mabel and Dipper standing on the beach.

Dipper leaned against Mabel's side. "We should've come back. After that first time."

"I was scared," Mabel said softly. "We got away and it just…got scarier. Things aren't like that at home."

"Nah, not really." He glanced at her. "But we made it back. And it's…*not* scary. Right?"

"I don't know." She lifted a hand to wave at her grunkles as their boat pulled up to the dock. "I guess we have to find out."


$CANDY$
(totally legal)
SMILE DIP
SMILE DIP
FLAVOR PUPS
NYUMS



Persistently Optimistic
By paperjamBipper

For as long as he could remember, Ford was convinced that nothing in this world could make him happier than the thrill of discovery. In a world where he was always seen as the abnormality, nothing put a bigger smile on his face than knowing he wasn't alone, that there were far weirder creatures out there than a geeky polydactyl scientist who played too many tabletop games.

He thought for sure that he would never find an outlet as comforting as research, as documented proof that there *was* a place where all the weirdos out there could fit in. And for *decades* he was right, and was sure research and oddities were the only positive consistencies he would ever have in his life.

But then came along Dipper and Mabel, and everything that was missing in his life just fell right back into place. Sure, he still finds unmeasurable joy in hunting down all the mythical creatures he'd been hearing about since his childhood, but now he's just as happy to be back in Gravity Falls for the summer as he was doing research out at sea.

He smiles to himself at the thought, and continues on with unpacking his things. He's only got one box left to unpack, and as long as nothing else distracts him he should be all finished and settled in within half an hour.

As if that train of thought was an invitation, Ford's hand brushes across something bright pink and covered in glitter.

Mabel's scrapbook.

He'd completely forgotten that he and Stan had taken it with them on their trip. She was the one who insisted they bring it in case Stan's memory started acting up again, and no matter how much Ford had protested in fear of damaging or losing it, she just shrugged it off and insisted that she could always make a new one.

They hadn't needed to use it nearly as much as Ford was originally thinking they would've, and for that he's eternally grateful, but just the weight of it in his hands is enough to cause a rush of emotions to come flooding back to him.

Mabel Pines is something special.

Even when all the hope in the world was lost, even when everyone else around her was grieving for lost love, she persisted. When all science and logic pointed towards failure and heartbreak, she persisted. She believed with her heart and soul that the answer was to love and nurture, and she was *right.*

Ford takes a moment to flip through some of the pages, now that there's no urgency or panic behind it. The more he flips through pages and pages of blurry photographs and paragraphs upon paragraphs written in glitter gel, the more he realizes just how exuberant and loving she is all the time, even through the written expression of her own private thoughts.

The more he reads, the more he realizes that...he doesn't know as much about Mabel as he thought he did. They'd spoken quite a few times over the previous summer, and Mabel was always present during the video calls home when he and Stan were out at sea, but it's hitting Ford that...he never really took the time to get to know her on a personal level like he had with Dipper.

...*No.* He closes the scrapbook and forces himself to stop that train of thought before the guilt has time to sneak its way in. There's still time. There's *plenty* of time. He gently places the scrapbook down on his desk, and makes his way up to Dipper and Mabel's shared attic bedroom.

He knocks gently on the door as he enters. Dipper's lying on his bed reading a book, and Mabel is lying down on the floor on her stomach as she scratches behind Waddles' ears.

"Hi Grunkle Ford!" she beams, and Dipper lowers his book to wave hello. "What brings you here?"

"Well, I wanted to check in and see how unpacking was coming along, but it appears that you're getting along just fine," he smiles, and takes a knee so he'll be closer to her eye level. "Mabel, dear, would you like to get some lunch with me? My treat."

"*Would I?*" she beams, and she's already dragging Ford out of the room before he has any time to explain why. "Free food *and* an afternoon with the smartest Grunkle in the world? Let's go!"

Ford can't help but smile fondly at her enthusiasm, and simply follows as she leads him by the hand out of the Shack. She practically skips along the sidewalk as they go, quietly humming a tune to herself. Even as she drags along someone at least twice her size, nothing slows her step for even a moment.

"So, what's the catch?" she asks once they're about halfway to the diner, cutting into his thoughts. Ford is initially taken aback by the question, but he finds relief in the smirk spreading across his niece's face. "Are you finally going to give me my invitation letter to wizard school?" She claps her hands together, her smirk growing ever so slightly mischievous. "Ooh, Dipper isn't here! Are you about to tell me that I'm your favorite nibling? It's okay, I promise I won't tell." She gently nudges at his side with her elbow, and a chuckle escapes Ford as he ruffles up her hair.

"I'm afraid it's a no on the wizard school, kiddo," he smirks, attempting to mirror her own. "You *just* missed the enrollment period by a few days."

"Oh, boo," Mabel pouts, crossing her arms over her chest. "Just when I'd started knitting my own wizard's robe, too."

"I'll be sure to put an extra good word for you next semester, then," he smiles, and gently places a hand on her shoulder. "However, there *is* something I wanted to discuss with you in private."

The mischievous grin doesn't waver on her face for even a moment. "Ooh, mysterious author-y secrets! Even better!" She tugs on his hand as she pulls him along at a faster pace, which only causes the smile on Ford's face to soften even more. He'd figured he wouldn't get very far conversation-wise on the way there, but leave it to Mabel Pines to make even a walk to the local diner twice as enjoyable as he ever could've imagined it.

…Even more of a reason to regret not trying to make a personal connection with her sooner, he supposes.

He does his best to keep that train of thought to himself, and spends the rest of the time on the walk to the diner just allowing himself to enjoy her company.

"So…" Mabel begins once they're settled into their table at Greasy's. "What's up?" She places her elbows on the table, and rests her chin on her hands. "I can't *imagine* what you could possibly find so important that you insist we talk about it privately, yet so tame that you insist on bringing me to the most popular restaurant in town."

Ford chuckles. "It's one of the only restaurants in town at all, dear. I'd say that title is pretty moot in this case." He scratches at his chin, suddenly finding that now that he has the opening he'd wanted to talk about things that he's feeling much more anxious about addressing them than he'd originally thought. "In all seriousness, Mabel, this is less about keeping secrets, or anything overly exciting like you were probably hoping, and more on the line of something…personal that I wanted to express with you."

"Oh, ho ho!" She beams, mischievously rubbing her hands together. "Grunkle Ford, have you finally come around on my matchmaking services? I know at least a *dozen* old ladies who would find you at least twice as attractive as Grunkle Stan, if you promise never to tell him I told you that!"

Ford's cheeks burn bright red, but he waves a dismissive hand before she can go any further with that conversation. "Th-that's very kind of you to offer, but…no," he clears his throat, hoping to clear the blush from his face as well. "I was thinking more on the lines of discussing what happened last summer."

"...Oh." Mabel's mischievous smile slips from her face. "You mean with the scrapbook? I already told you that it's no big deal."

Ford shakes his head. "It *is* a big deal, Mabel. I'm not sure Stan would've ever been the same again if it hadn't been for your persistent optimism and quick thinking."

"Aww, shucks, Grunkle Ford," Mabel waves a hand, a light blush forming on her cheeks. "You know that's just how I am."

"But it's so much *more* than that, Mabel." Ford reaches across the table and takes Mabel's hands in his own. "You're a brilliant young girl that never gives up on her hopes and dreams in even the most dire of circumstances, but…" he casts his glance elsewhere to avoid eye contact with her, "I only wish I'd been able to see that sooner. I neglected you in favor of your brother last summer, and I want to make it up to you. I'm sorry."

Silence, save for the sound of Mabel getting up from her seat. Ford sighs, and prepares to stand to follow her out the door to further explain, but before he can so much as scoot a single inch out of his booth, there are a pair of tiny arms around him.

"Is that what this is about?" Mabel's words are muffled as she hugs him. "Grunkle Ford, you big softie!" She gives him a big squeeze before she releases and returns to her seat across from him. "I'm always happy to have an excuse to spend some private time with my favorite Grunkles, but you don't need to feel bad about anything!"

Ford blinks. That was…certainly not the reaction he was expecting. "Really?"

"Of course!" she beams. "All that it means is that you have the pleasure of getting to know me now!" She offers a hand in his direction. "It's nice to meet you, Grunkle Ford."

There's something inexplicably contagious about the way she smiles. Ford can't help but offer a warm smile in return as he shakes her hand. "The pleasure's all mine," he replies, which only widens her smile even further.

"So is there anything in particular that you were hoping to question me about? I know you said that it didn't have anything to do with letting you borrow the scrapbook for the winter, but I've been told that my methods of seeking out scrapbook-ortunities are… *questionable.*"

Ford can't help but laugh. "No, I assure you that I'm not here to criticize the means of which you organize your scrapbook without your explicit permission." He places a hand to his chest in mock offense. "As a fellow author, I'm horrified at the thought."

That gets a laugh out of Mabel, and she relaxes into her seat. Ford knows he can't stall this conversation forever, though, so he reaches across the table and takes her hand again. "In all seriousness, Mabel, this…*does* have a bit to do with your scrapbook, but not in the way you may be expecting."

"Oh?" Mabel raises an eyebrow. "How so?"

"I mean…" Ford sighs. "There's so much love in you, Mabel. I've only had the time to read a portion of your scrapbook, and I feel as though I was able to gather more about your personality from reading those entries than any of the efforts I made last summer."

Ford twiddles with his thumbs anxiously, but continues before she has the chance to cut him off. "You're so optimistic, even when you're face to face with the direst of circumstances. You're so full of hope and love that you're able to continuously push against the obstacles in your way to make sure that everyone on *both* sides of a problem can be happy."

He shakes his head in disbelief, but a small smile forms on his face nonetheless. "Mabel, in a world where I grew up being told that you have to rely on logic and smarts to get anywhere useful, you managed to fight back with the power of love and come out of that fight *victorious.*"

His gaze falls towards the table, suddenly finding that he's far too embarrassed to meet her eyes. "In other words…" he pauses for the briefest of moments "…thank you for proving me wrong."

There's another bout of silence, but this one doesn't feel nearly as heavy as the previous one. Ford finally finds the courage to lift his gaze from the table and back towards Mabel, and her eyes are shining brighter than anything he's ever encountered in the multiverse. "Grunkle Ford, that's so sweet!" she squeals, excitedly kicking her feet against her seat. "This is even *better* than wizard school!"

"It's my pleasure, dear," he smiles warmly in response. Her happiness truly is the most contagious thing in the universe. "It's *why* I regret not taking the time to get to know you sooner. I know you've already told me I don't need to apologize, but the honest truth is that I feel like there's a lot I can learn from you."

"Is that what this is about?" she replies, though her beaming smile stays where it is on her face. "Grunkle Ford, do you think that I think you're all cold and uncaring?"

Ford rubs awkwardly at the back of his neck. "Not necessarily you *specifically,* but…" he pauses for a moment to try and gather the proper way to phrase things, "I've never found myself able to approach things with the same sort of caring, optimistic attitude that you seem to carry around with you on a daily basis, and I really admire that about you."

"Aww, but you don't have to try and force yourself to be like that! Grunkle Ford, you're one of the most caring people I know! You're so protective, and you care a *lot* about your research, and about me and Dipper, and even Stan! I don't know what happened between you two when Bill had you captured in that…pyramid prison thing, but look how far you've gotten! You couldn't even look each other in the eyes last summer, and now you're sailing all over the world together! You don't need kindness lessons from me; you've got plenty of it already!"

…Now *Ford's* the one with a blush rising to his cheeks. "Thank you, dear, that means a lot to me."

"Of course!" She reaches her hands across the table once more. "I love you just the way you are, Grunkle Ford," she smiles softly, a mischievous twinkle shining in her eyes. "But if you're *still* willing to take me out to free lunch and go on private little adventures after this amazing pep talk I just gave you, I won't complain."

Ford can't help the chuckle that escapes him. "It'd be an honor, dear."


BEST
BEST
GRUNKLE
MYSTERY
SHACK
2 Miles

Urban Fantasy

By Amuk

There are no faeries in the University of California, Berkeley.

There were no gnomes, centaurs, or unicorns either. Dipper wasn't surprised. Most cities didn't have magic, aliens, or supernatural creatures. The few that did had only the smallest whispers of the strange, the kind of things that were easy to overlook and miss. In the ten years since his summer at Gravity Falls, Dipper could count on one hand the shenanigans he'd fallen into.

That didn't make his disappointment any less. He sighed as he meandered down the street, taking in the sprawling campus around him. Part of him had hoped that with its history, the university would prove different.

"There's no faeries here either," Mabel replied in his ear, chipper as ever. If something hadn't changed with time, it was her overbearingly positive attitude. "I even checked Central Park—you know, they have an Alice in Wonderland area? But none of the weird things that she met. It's like, are you even trying?"

Dipper stared blankly into the distance, his grip relaxing on his phone. It was like she'd read his mind. "Huh?"

Unfazed by his lack of response, Mabel rattled on, "Well, actually, I think I saw a wererat or something in the subway, but that might have just been a normal rat too. Apparently they can grow as big as a cat? Which actually is freakier than anything I've ever seen. Who'd you think would win in a fight?"

She'd always been good at filling in the silence. Even now, states apart, that hadn't changed. Ever the social butterfly, Mabel always had something to say, whether it was gossip or a discovery or her feelings on a really niche topic that no one else knew about.

On the plus side, her monologue gave Dipper enough time to process their conversation. He must have accidentally spoken aloud. His ears flushed red with embarrassment and he rubbed his neck, even though she couldn't see that through the screen. Chuckling awkwardly, he replied, "I guess magic just doesn't like cities."

"Cities?" Mabel snorted, cutting off her rant on how the commuters on the subway were the real monsters. Dipper didn't have to see her to know her hands were moving a mile a minute, as though her entire body had to talk with every word she said. "Did we ever see magic anywhere aside from Gravity Falls? *Really* see, and not 'I-think-I-saw-a-ghoul-but-it's-midnight-and-I'm-drunk'?"

Dipper flushed a brighter red and he glanced around. Mabel's voice was so loud, he was certain she could be heard in the next town over. Luckily, none of the other students paid him any mind, too busy trying to get from class to class to care about him. "That was one time."

"And every other time was just as sketchy!" Mabel argued with a huff. For once, she had a point. "Seriously, though, how is just one town such a hotbed for magic?" She chuckled. "Bet you'd love to write a paper on that."

Now it was Dipper's turn to laugh. He lowered his voice, trying for a mysterious husky that the women in his class seemed to like. "What makes you think I haven't?"

There was a pause on the other end before Mabel muttered, "I hope you're joking, or I'm *really* worried about your non-existent social life."

He flinched. There went his dreams of being enigmatic. Maybe he was wrong about the voice. Or maybe it just didn't work on Mabel. "Hey, I have one," Dipper protested, trying to keep the whine out of his voice.

"Your nerd clubs don't count." Mabel sighed. "And you don't even have me around to make sure you're cool."

"It's not like you're the expert of cool," Dipper grumbled, sulking. While Mabel was the social butterfly between the two, her sweaters had all but guaranteed that the popular kids had ignored her throughout high school. They were both dorky outcasts, albeit in different ways.

"Still cooler than you." Mabel hummed. He wondered what kind of sweater she was wearing now. Even the summer heat couldn't stop her from donning one. Maybe he should investigate her for magic. "Hey, wanna go back this summer?"

For the second time that day, Dipper stared blankly ahead as he tried to process her words. "Back?"

"To Gravity Falls!" Mabel chirped, her words spilling out of her faster and faster as her excitement grew. "The Grunkles said they'd be back in June!"

"They will?" Dipper shouted. Immediately, he covered his mouth, but it was too late. His fellow schoolmates gave him a curious look

before ignoring him once more. Maybe he shouldn't have called Mabel while he was walking to class. At this rate, he was going to get a reputation.

"Yeah, said they're taking a land break." Mabel giggled, clearly amused. He hoped she wasn't laughing at him. "I wonder who got sea-sick. Or maybe they're becoming mermaids after being out there for so long."

"It's not like they were swimming the whole time," Dipper pointed out, though in all honesty, it's not like magic ever required logic to happen. Maybe just being on the water long enough was all it took to change.

"We could celebrate their birthday too." Mabel let out a happy hoot and he could hear her bounce. "They're what, 70 now? It'll be a lot of candles but I think we can do it."

"You don't have to put that many candles," Dipper vetoed, already picturing a cake full of holes. *Seventy, huh?* It was hard to think about just how old that was. His grunkles had always been old, it was part of the reason they were *grunkles* and not *uncles*. Still, when he was younger, they'd felt almost immortal. Even with the strange magic and danger and world-destroying evil monsters, it had felt like nothing could stop them.

Now that Dipper was an adult and knew a little too much about the aging process and a smattering of biology, he knew better.

And that knowledge did little to reassure him.

"You're overthinking again," Mabel said, cutting through his thoughts. Despite how nonsensical she was, her voice always had a sense of clarity and purpose, as though she could see something he couldn't.

In some ways, he was certain she could.

Dipper chuckled awkwardly, not bothering to deny it. Mabel spotted his lies easily these days. "How do you always know?"

"We're twins," she stated matter-of-factly, as though this were a law of the universe, codified in science. He could almost see her wagging her finger at him. "It's the twin connection. Twin ESP? Oh!" She clapped her hands together. "You know, maybe we're just made of magic."

Dipper snorted. That was exactly the kind of pick-me-up he needed to hear. "I don't feel that magical."

"That's cause you're overthinking things again. You're not looking at it the right way." Mabel hummed. He could hear cars in the background as Mabel threaded her way through New York City. It was a good thing the whole city was so busy; he couldn't imagine the looks she must have gotten talking like this on the subway earlier. "I mean, you never look at things the right way, but this time you're *very* wrong."

"Yes, yes, I'm always wrong and you're right." Dipper rolled his eyes. He stopped walking now and stretched his hand above him as he stared at the clear, blue sky. "So, how should I look at it?"

"The right way." Undaunted, she continued. Her words bumped into one another as she got invested in her new pet theory. "We are magic. You're magic. I said it, so it's true."

As usual, Mabel didn't make any sense. The tiny bud of hope he'd felt withered away. Dipper dragged a hand through his hair, his nails scratching his scalp. "I don't think it works that way.

"Of course it works that way." He could hear Mabel wave her hand dismissively. It was a miracle she hadn't hit another pedestrian as she spoke; with how animated her arms could get sometimes, Dipper had considered selling her to a power company. "It's *magic*, duh! It works anyway! No wonder you were having issues finding any. How would you find anything if you act like that? You have to believe in it."

Miffed, Dipper pointed out, "It's not like you found it either, Miss. High-And-Mighty."

"I can't find *magical creatures*," Mabel corrected. "I've always found magic."

He stared at his phone. Did he want to ask? Dipper could feel a headache forming. Even now, as adults, there were still times when he didn't quite know how to handle Mabel. Still, he'd be thinking about this all night if he kept quiet. With a sigh, he put it back to his ear. "There's a difference?"

"Yeah! Obviously!" Mabel snorted, her pig-like laughter cracking through the cellphone's speaker. "Magical creatures are like people. If they don't want to be found, you won't find them. Magic, though, is kinda a…hmmm…remember when we saw Peter Pan? You gotta *believe* in order to find it. It's really easy too."

“Is it now?” Dipper rubbed his forehead. He was definitely going to need Advil. “And what magic have you seen?”

“Well, that’s—” Mabel gasped. “Oh, shit, I think my class is starting! Gotta go!”

Dipper shouted, “Wait, Mabel—”

“Love you!” And without another word, the dial tone returned as Mabel cut him off.

“Mabel!” he fruitlessly shouted again. Dipper grimaced as he hung up. Of course she left before saying the most important part. Of course she’d been vague and her instructions made no sense. Believe in magic? How? What would he see after?

No matter how much he mulled over it, it wouldn’t make sense. Maybe he should just pack up and head to his own class.

Yet, Mabel never lied to him, not anymore. If she said she’d seen it, she’d seen it. Even if she was just mistaking something else for magic. Part of him wanted to believe. The world felt grey without the strange and wondrous.

God, he wished he had her confidence.

Dipper bit his lip. Maybe it wouldn’t hurt this one time to listen to her. To just believe. He closed his eyes. Magic. Science. Paranormal. The weird. Remembering Gravity Falls, remembering that one magical, strange, weird summer, he opened his eyes.

Nothing happened. Nothing changed. Students passed by. The wind blew.

Dipper sighed. Of course it’d ended like this. He straightened up and shoved his phone in his pocket, ready to go. Just before he could take a step, a man walked past, his body lump, his steps uneven.

There was something familiar about his shape, his gait. A memory of three gnomes in a trench coat buzzed faintly in his mind. Of the first incident that had led him into an adventure he could never forget.

It was probably nothing. There were many scientific reasons for it: a man with a limp, two kids in a trenchcoat, a drunkard stumbling along the street. If Dipper reached out, if he tapped on his shoulder, he’d definitely be disappointed by the result.

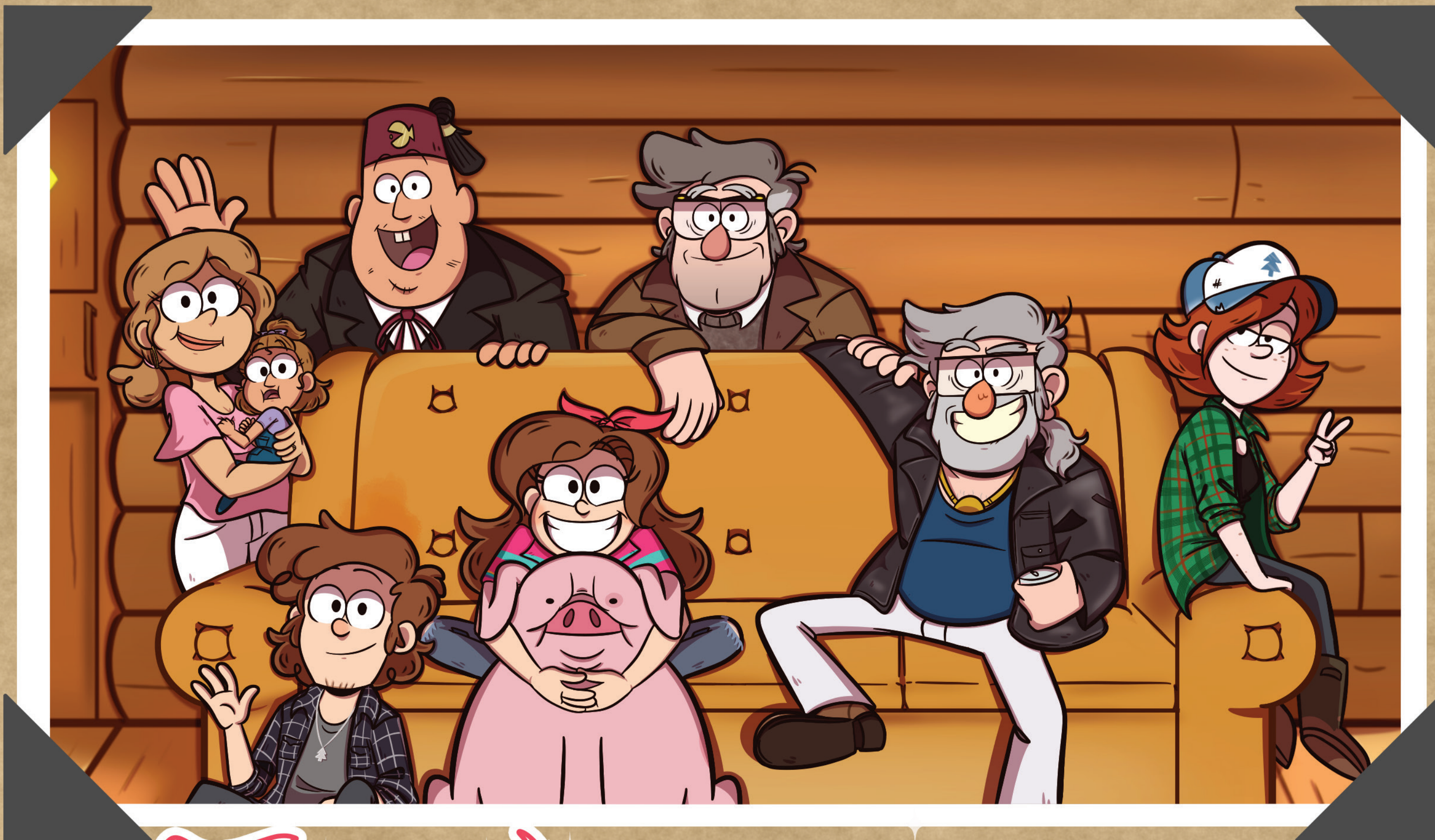
It was better to go to class. He should just go to class. But—

Magic works only if you believe.

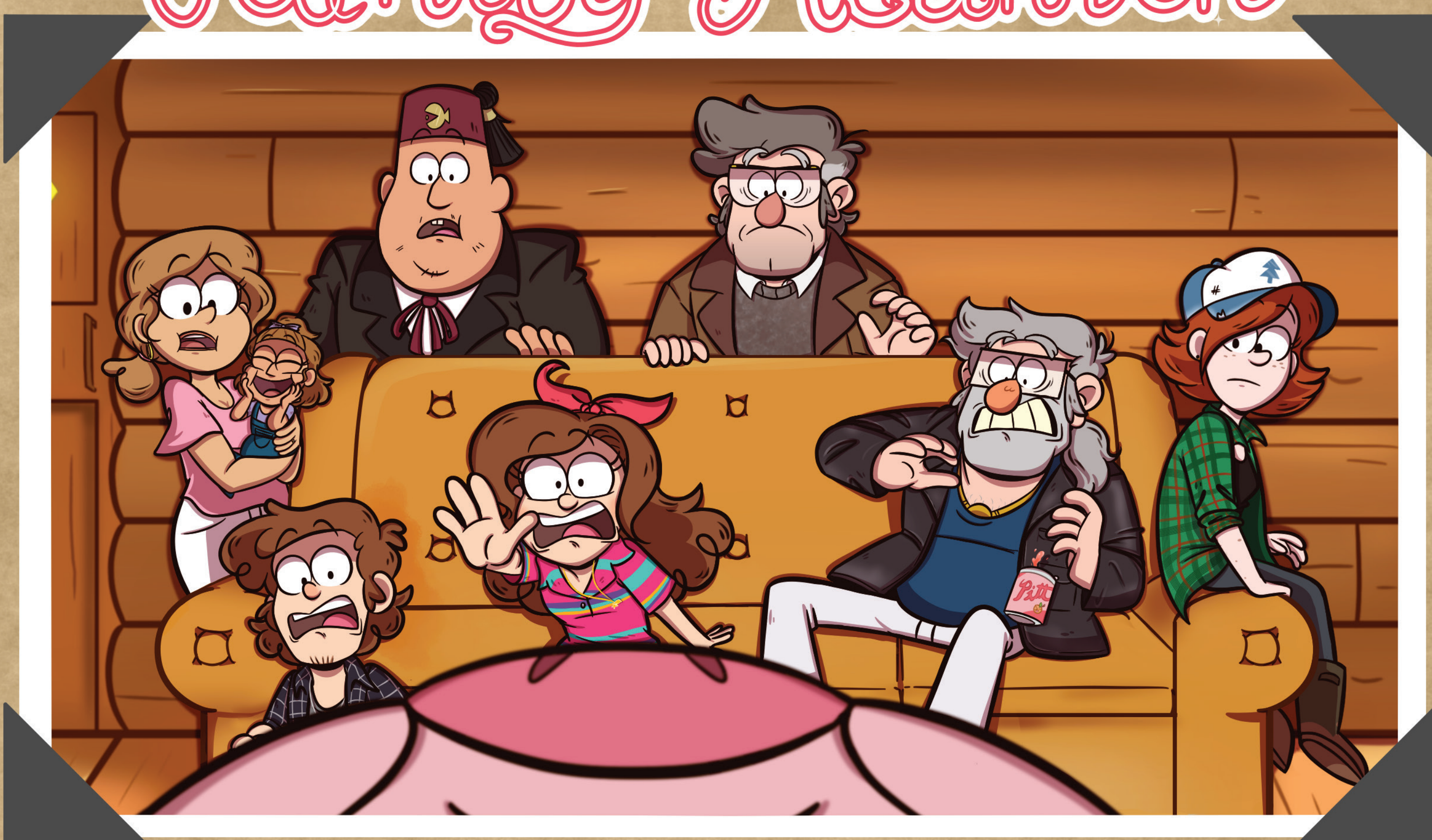
—for once, he hoped Mabel was right.

Pivoting on his heel, Dipper chased after the stranger. Maybe this summer really would be something special.


★first day of high school!★
@Fexiled
Dear Kids,
We have a stowaway!
little calico kitten—
snuck on board
n we were docked
othenburg. We're
lready in Scotland, so
we'll have to drop her
off on our way back.
She IS pretty cute, I
admit...
Love,
Ford & $TAN
PIEDMONT, CA
USA 94618
DON'T LISTEN TO HIM, WE'RE KEEPING HER!!
STAN-O'-WAR II
WISH YOU WERE HERE!!
SAILOR'S FAVORITE SLEEP SPOT
Grunkles!!!
We're all settled in at our dorm now, and college is going great! I've met so many cool people already. Dipper thinks one of his new friends from coding class is a vampire, but we played DD&MD with them last week and I didn't notice anything. Miss you guys, can't wait to see you this winter!
I have → proof!!
Love, Mabel & Dipper
P.S. Send more cat pics!!
5
Grandpa Stan and Baby
Sup, dudes!
BEHOLD: The World's Cutest Baby! I can't get enough of this li'l nugget. Sorry you guys couldn't make it up here in time, we didn't think it would happen so early! I'm glad Stan and Ford were here. Melody was super calm but I was like, totally panicking, dude. More pics coming soon!
Soos
Melody



Family Reunion





Commencement

By Aba Mabel

Mabel stood on the gravelly sidewalk just outside the football field, which felt rough and uneven against her high heeled shoes. The wind blew her hair around, which was disappointing because she spent hours that morning trying to get the curls to lay just right. But she had bigger problems right now. As she waited in line for the promenade, Mabel realized there was no one standing to her right. Ok well, there was someone there, but it was a stranger. She peeked around the bleachers – no one standing on the stage either.

Dipper was missing seven minutes before their college graduation ceremony. Mabel tried to convince herself there was some ridiculous reason why he was late. Maybe he had spilled coffee down the front of his shirt? Or maybe while trying to put on his tie he accidentally tied himself into one big knot? But neither reason seemed very good. Dipper was far too anxious to be late for anything.

The twins liked to pretend like going to the same college was a happy accident. Mabel claimed it was because the college was just a few blocks away from the city's art district and would help her find work in a studio or museum. Dipper simply said it was because the school offered him the best scholarships, and was also willing to let him attempt his ambitious double major. Of course, the true reason was that it was the only school they had agreed on.

Giving a cautious glance over her shoulder to make sure no one was around to scold her for leaving, Mabel slipped out of her place in the line and hurried around the football field. They were running out of time and he needed to be there.

Turning around by the concessions stand, Mabel found a familiar lanky figure passing back and forth across the grass. Dipper muttered to himself, flipping through the stack of notecards in his hands. His black gown whipped in the wind and curled around his legs with each anxious step he took.

"Bro, you gotta be back at the ceremony like… now!" Mabel exclaimed. "Come on, Mr. Commencement Speaker. Let's go!"

Dipper looked up, realizing that she was there. "I'm sorry," he groaned. "I'm just— augh! I feel so nervous. I can't believe I said yes to doing this. What was I thinking?" He continued to pace more frantically, his shiny black dress shoes leaving scuff marks in the grass.

Mabel shrugged, "Probably because it's a huge honor. And you've totally earned it."

He made a nervous expression, face pale and mouth twisted up. He rubbed at his upper arm, an old nervous habit. "Have I earned it? I mean, what am I really going to achieve after this?"

Mabel had done so well for herself, he thought. People like to say art degrees are useless, but in her usual fashion, Mabel had proved all those people wrong. Her senior project titled "Apocalypses and Dream Bubbles" sold to a collector. She had won several prizes in competitions and, not to mention, her charity focused on knitting sweaters for the homeless had done very well. Mabel would be fine after graduation.

Dipper knew he had much to also be proud of. Being a triple major in Biology, Physics, and Film Production with a 4.0 is no small feat. Yet he still felt small and ill prepared for what the world had to offer. You'd think after surviving a demonic armageddon that he would feel more confident in himself, but you would be wrong.

"What about MIT? Have they gotten back to you about grad school yet?"

He gave a slow nod. "Accepted."

"That's incredible, Dip! It won't be long until I'm introducing everyone to my brother, *Dr.* Pines." Playfully, Mabel elbowed his side.

Dipper chucked, "Grunkle Ford is also a doctor, and he has like… 12 PhDs."

"Eh," she waved a hand flippantly. "He went to school in the 70's back when things were easy and you could pay for college with a summer job."

That got a chuckle to rise up from Dipper's chest, a temporary moment of relief. "I guess that's true. But I just…" his voice drifted off along with his thoughts. "I'm not sure if that's what I want."

"Not what you want? Pfft. You love school and nerdy stuff. MIT should be begging on their knees for you to go there."

"But what comes after MIT?" he said, a bit more forceful in his tone. "What will I do? What's my calling? My purpose? You've found your calling. You'll get to paint and travel and work with your charity." Mabel flushed a deep pink in her checks. She fiddled with the tassel on her graduation cap. "What's wrong?" Dipper asked.

"I'm not sure what comes after that either," she admitted. "Sure, I'm doing all the things I love now. But what will happen in a few

years? I'm…" Mabel paused, struggling to put her feelings into concise thoughts. "Scared. What if the future isn't everything I want it to be?"

He sighed and leaned back against the wall of the concessions stand, nearly knocking the cap off his head. "I'm scared of that too."

Mabel pursed her lips in thought. "Remember the first summer in Gravity Falls?"

"It's a little hard to forget considering the amount of times we almost died."

"Yeah, but looking beyond all the horrifying monsters and near-death experiences."

Dipper closed his eyes, thinking back to those days– the hot sun on the back of his neck, the sting of breath in his lungs as he ran screaming from monsters. "I miss the adventure," he said. "The adrenaline coursing through me."

"Mediocre pancakes from Greasy's Diner. That funny, moldy smell in the Mystery Shack." She breathed in, as if the scent were in front of her. "Seeing all of our friends. Hanging out with Stan and Ford."

Kicking one foot into the grass, a billow of dry dirt flew into the air, Dipper let it dirty the tops of his once clean shoes. "I want to study the supernatural, like Ford did. And I want to start in Gravity Falls and do my own research. And, I know you have all of these plans for the summer, but if you wanted to come with me–"

Mabel cut him off, gripping him at the shoulders and jumping up and down. "Yes! Definitely! Absolutely!" With each jump, she shook Dipper back and forth like a doll.

He braced her arms and pushed her away, blinking the stars from his eyes. "Alright!" he chuckled.

Mabel gave him a knowing smile that tugged gently at the sides of her mouth. She held out a fist. "Mystery twins are back in action."

Dipper grinned back and bumped his fist into hers. "We definitely are." They laughed, feeling like children for the first time in years.

From across the football field, they could hear the commencement music starting to play. Mabel grabbed Dipper by the forearm and pulled him back towards where students were lined up alphabetically by last name. They wiggled into their positions in the line just moments before they were set to walk along the grass. Mabel walked in unison with the music, each of her steps radiating delight and confidence, while Dipper tried his hardest not to see how many people were in the crowds.

Throughout the ceremony, Mabel gave Dipper a few pats on the shoulder. She knew he would give a great speech, he just needed some support. Once the graduation ceremony was over, they would be packing their bags and headed off to a summer in Gravity Falls.

The president of the college leaned forward into the microphone. "I would now like to welcome our Student Commencement Speaker, Mason Pines." Dipper grimaced. He had specifically asked them to call him Dipper.

Dipper made his way up to the stage that was placed in the center of the football field. The sun blinded his vision and made thick beads of sweat trickle down his face. He shuffled the notecards in his hand anxiously. He sucked in a breath, realizing how long he must have been standing in front of the microphone without saying anything. He had spent hours preparing his speech, making sure it contained all the best quotes from Albert Einstein and Maya Angelou and even a joke to lighten the mood. But at that moment, he realized he really didn't care about the speech at all.

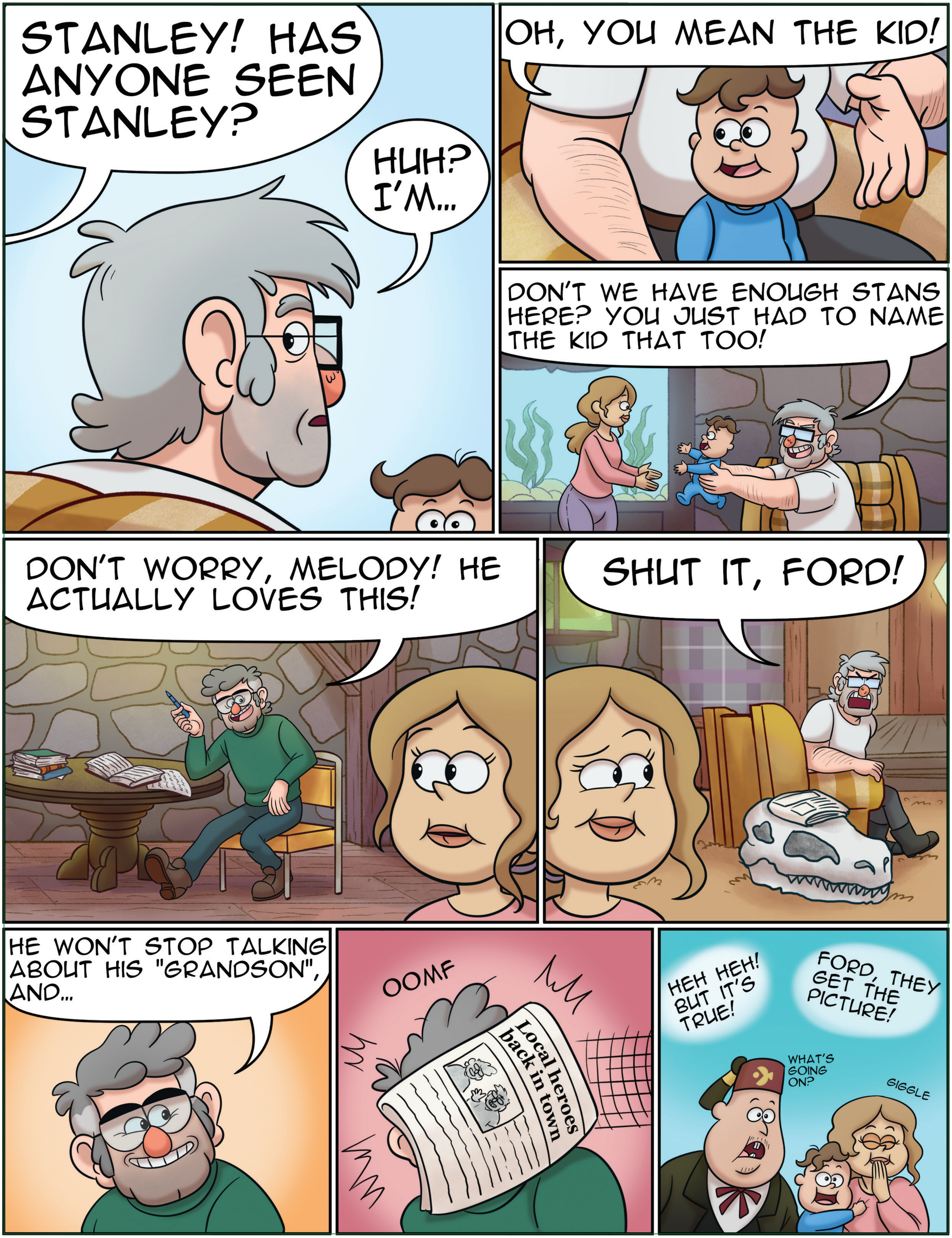
Looking at the crowd, he tried not to feel daunted by the photographers standing nearby or the president of the college standing to his right. Instead, he looked at Mabel, the paint-splattered stole around her shoulders and the goofy grin on her face as she gave him a thumbs up. He saw his parents, happily looking at him through the lens of a phone. And of course, Stan and Ford. Stan was clapping and shouting as loud as he possibly could, while Ford nodded his head in approval.

Dipper set down the notecards and instead focused his family. He swallowed, feeling the nerves start to take over, but began to speak. "I spent my first summer in Gravity Falls when I was a kid with my twin sister, Mabel."

Mabel hollered from her seat and pumped her fist in the air. "Yeah!"

Dipper cracked a grin, feeling the anxiety subside. "The summer we spent there was full of uncertainty. Everything felt new and even dangerous. But it reminded me that the world is full of magic and adventure. So long as you have the right people with you, anything is possible. I think we should keep chasing that adventure; that wonder and awe we haven't felt since we were kids. Your Gravity Falls is out there somewhere."

He looked back at Mabel, who had turned around to wave at Stan and Ford in the crowd. He felt his face flush, hot from the sun and excitement for the future. "Some people think it's a myth," Dipper continued. "But if you're curious, don't wait. Take a trip. Find it. It's out there somewhere in the woods. Waiting."


STANLEY! HAS ANYONE SEEN STANLEY?
HUH? I'M...
OH, YOU MEAN THE KID!
DON'T WE HAVE ENOUGH STANS HERE? YOU JUST HAD TO NAME THE KID THAT TOO!
DON'T WORRY, MELODY! HE ACTUALLY LOVES THIS!
SHUT IT, FORD!
HE WON'T STOP TALKING ABOUT HIS "GRANDSON", AND...
OOMF
Local heroes back in town
HEH HEH! BUT IT'S TRUE!
FORD, THEY GET THE PICTURE!
WHAT'S GOING ON?
GIGGLE

Limits

By inabsurd

"Dr. Pines? Dr. Pines, are you listening?"

Dipper blinks. "Yeah, sorry," he says, suddenly aware of the way his throat seems to stick to itself. "I'm listening, it's just…it's a lot?"

Even to his own ears, it sounds like a flimsy excuse, but nothing else feels as accurate.

The old woman smiles at him, a self-satisfied grin on her face. "Yes, this is a fantastic opportunity for you. I imagine it must be quite the shock."

He isn't sure what part of that statement he wants to argue with most; that the 'fantastic opportunity' is for *him* when the board is clearly hoping to get a shoo-in in oddology, or the idea that their self-serving offer is what has shocked him and not the title.

Dr. Pines. He doesn't even *have* his masters yet, and…

He clears his throat. "Thank you for the…offer, but I'm going to focus on actually finishing my degree before anything else."
The smug grin washes away in an instant, leaving a blank canvas for the head of administration to draw on a new expression. She glances at her colleagues to gather strength, then straightens and smiles. "Dr. Pines—"

"It's *Dipper,*" an animosity he doesn't recognize makes itself known. "Dr. Pines was my grunkle."

Her face blanks out once more before she replaces it with something that feigns the understanding of grief but has not truly felt it.

"Dr. Stanford Pines was a great loss to the scientific community—"

Dipper doesn't stay to hear the rest. He's not interested in their stupid offer.

By the time he makes it back to the apartment, Dipper has walked off most of his anger.

Most of it.

Seeing Mabel is enough to shake off the rest, draining him of whatever semblance of energy he has left. Wordlessly, he slumps into one of their kitchen chairs and plonks his forehead onto the table. The surface is suspiciously greasy under his face but he can't bring himself to lift his head.

Next to him, he hears the scrape of a second chair being pulled out.

"So, how was the big meeting?" Mabel pokes his cheek.

"Long."

"Uh-huh." She pokes him again.

"And boring."

"Uh-huh." Another poke.

"And I hated it."

She gives a short laugh. *"Uh-huh.* But how did it *go?*"

Dipper huffs into the table, rolling his face so his cheek is smooshed against the cheap plastic instead of his nose. "I dunno, fine I guess. They liked me enough to offer me a job—"

That's as far as he gets before Mabel is squealing far too close to his ears. "That's great! It's not, like, an unpaid internship or anything, is it?"

He sure *hopes* they weren't wanting him to do it all for free, but, then again, they never got that far. "Dunno," he answers, "I told them no."

There's a silence, which says more than Mabel probably means for it to. Slowly, she asks, "You…said no?"

He rolls so he's face-down on the table again. "Mhm."

There's another bout of silence, although one not quite so long. "Okay, you lost me. I thought this meeting was, like, a big deal and you were super nervous for it?"

"Yeah."

"And you told the members of the board, during this super important meeting that could determine your future or whatever, that you *didn't* want the *paid job they were offering?"*

"Pretty much." The table is starting to hurt his nose again.

"Dipper!" she smacks him with the floppy sleeve of her sweater.

He sits up fast enough that his vision spots from the sudden shift. He thinks he might have been about to yell at her, or something close to it, but the second he sees her big, concerned eyes, he deflates. He and Mabel have done more than enough yelling in the wake of the funeral.

"They called me doctor."

"...Okay?" Just as Dipper is about to explain, she sucks in a short gasp. "Oh. Wait, yeah, um..."

"Yeah."

Stan is Mr. Pines, Mr. Mystery, and Ford is—*was*—Dr. Pines a dozen times over. It made things less confusing for people meeting them, but the prefixes were really there for *them.* It was one of the only things they insisted on being separate from each other.

Dipper has never really felt grown up enough to even be a Mr. Pines, but *doctor?*

It's a lot, especially after Ford's death. No matter what his degree says, he'll always just be Dipper, and he's okay with that. He already has to try to fill Ford's shoes; calling him Dr. Pines like he's the only one there has ever been would be too much.

Finally, Mabel asks, "So, what now?"

Dipper shrugs. "Finish my degree, I guess." He still has to defend his thesis, after all. Only scientist in oddology or not, he still technically needs university approval, even if they basically already gave it.

"And then what?"

He shrugs again. "Research, maybe? Me and Ford never did solve the Gravity Falls Law of Weirdness Magnetism.

Mabel gives him a *look,* nose scrunched like she's caught a whiff of manotaur. "Research. Really?"

"Yeah, Mabes, what else is there?" he huffs.

Something like pity crosses her face. "Non-research things," she says seriously. "You should think about the school's offer. It might be fun to teach the next generation of nerds."

——?——

Mabel's words keep him up all night.

When he and Mabel graduated, Mabel decided to take a gap year. She has so many passions, so many strengths, that she wasn't sure where she wanted her life to take her. Textiles? Business? Arts in general? A double major, maybe? She'd confessed that she's always felt pulled a thousand directions at once and with literally any option available to her between the scholarships Dipper knew she could get and student loans, she decided to just take time off and find out where her passions truly lay.

Dipper, though, has only ever wanted one thing. He loves the supernatural, loves the thrill of finding something unknown to everyone else out there. He loves adventuring to new locations. He even loves the 'boring' parts like taking notes and writing papers.

He's always only wanted one thing, but it…never really crossed his mind that Ford wouldn't be there for all of it.

He wanted to travel with his grunkles on their boat. He wanted to bounce theories and ideas off of Ford. He wanted to hear more about his interdimensional travel. He wanted to play more DDMD together.

He wanted more time with Ford.

It's been a little over a month since the funeral but it still doesn't feel real because Dipper can't picture a future without Ford around. He's never had to, but now the university and Mabel want to know what he's going to do next.

And he has no idea.

——?——

Dipper emails the faculty about what, exactly, creating and running his own faculty would entail the next day. It's a lot of paperwork, mostly. A lot of teaching, too, which doesn't sound horrible, but it would mean he'd be chained to the university for several years as he teaches and builds up an actual staff to help him run it all.

He thinks Ford would do it. Ford always loved teaching, loved having Dipper as an apprentice, and he took a lot of pride in explaining his life's work to even the most uninterested of listeners. Ford even told him once that, when he still thought Bill was a muse, he and McGucket talked about starting their own school after they were done with the portal.

It's on a smaller scale than Ford's idea but he would have jumped at this chance. The next generation of nerds, a whole faculty of apprentices…Ford would love it. Mabel already thinks it's a good idea. His parents would no doubt be thrilled by it all, too.

Dipper…isn't sure how he feels. He tells the board he'll reconsider their offer and get back to them in a few days with an answer.

It takes him a few more sleepless nights and busy days before Mabel decides his 'brooding' has gotten old.

He's pacing in his room, making yet another addition to his now seven-page long pros and cons list that has buried every keepsake and essay on his desk, when Mabel kicks his door open.

"That's it!" she declares with a manic sort of energy he has never understood. "It's time to call Grunkle Stan!"
Dipper can hardly hear her over the sound of his heart pounding in his ears from the heart attack she just gave him, but when she thrusts her bedazzled phone into his hand—already making an outgoing call to one 'Grunkle Softie'—he puts two and two together.

"Mabel, what, no—!"

She spins out of his room for dramatic effect, grabbing his door and slamming it shut behind her.

In his hand, Mabel's phone stops dialling and he hears a familiar, gruff voice ring through, *"Hey, Sweetpea."*

"Uh, hi, Grunkle Stan," he says awkwardly.

There's a beat and then, *"Dipper! Good to hear from ya. You break your phone or somethin'?"*

For a moment, Dipper is thrown for a loop. Didn't he talk to Stan, like, two weeks ago? But then he remembers that this last week he had two midterms, and the week and a half before that he was holed up telling himself he was studying in between working on his thesis. Before that he was too tired to talk to much of anyone, even Mabel, so no way he called Grunkle Stan then, which means… He hasn't spoken to Stan since the funeral.

"Sorry about that," Dipper winces, throat suddenly dry. "I've been busy."

Stan barks a laugh in his ear. *"Thought I taught ya better than lying to liars, Kid."*

"No, seriously. Midterms and essays and all."

Just because he *has* been busy, though, doesn't mean that's why he hasn't called. He knows it, Stan knows it, and Stan has never been polite enough not to push Dipper when he's already uncomfortable.

"Uh-huh," he says, just waiting for Dipper to crack.

It doesn't take long. "I didn't feel like talking," he finally grumbles.

"So Mabel's told me," Stan gripes.

Dipper feels just a little bit guilty. It's been longer than he thought it was, but there was just…so much happening. That isn't much of an excuse, though, and Dipper can almost picture Stan scrubbing his hand over his face, grimacing as he tries to figure out how to address his least favourite thing; feelings. *"Look,"* he starts, only to interrupt himself with a swear. There are a few more short, false-starts after that one, which leaves Dipper feeling more and more awkward.

Unable to handle another botched attempt at a heart-to-heart, Dipper finally takes the initiative. "How are you doing with…all of

this?" Even two months later, Dipper still can't bring himself to say out loud that Ford is dead.

There's a lingering silence, but Dipper has gotten pretty used to creating those within his normally over-the-top family. *"'Bout the same as you, if I had to guess,"* Stan finally answers. *"I lived most of my life not knowin' if Ford was dead or alive, but I think knowin' might be worse."*
Dipper nods, though Stan can't see him. "It's weird to think about," he admits quietly. "I keep—not forgetting that he's gone—but it just doesn't feel real, I guess?"
Stan lets out a punctuated breath that Dipper thinks is supposed to be a laugh. *"I know what that's like. Mabel says there's more, though? College stuff or somethin'?"*

"Oh," Dipper chuckles awkwardly into the receiver. "It's probably not as big a deal as she's making it seem. I'm just…y'know. The university is offering me this incredible job but, I dunno, it's a lot? On my own, I mean. It's a lot. I don't think I can handle it."

"Somethin' you *can't handle? That doesn't sound right. Ya wanna try again?"*

Dipper scowls. "I have *limits,* you know?"

"Sure ya do," this time Dipper is sure his grunkle is laughing at him, *"S'just weird to hear ya* admit it."

That's unfair. Dipper gets in over his head *all* the time. More than once, he's had to bring in reinforcements to get both personal and academic projects done in time because he was just a little overambitious. It's not like he's overconfident, though, he just has a habit of biting off more than he can chew.

Although, now that he thinks about it, he keeps doing it even after he's overloaded himself multiple times. Dipper is fully aware of his limits, he just tends to ignore them.

Oh.

"I don't think I'd like the job, either," he realizes.

"There it is," Stan says, sounding smug. *"Y'know how many things I had to talk Ford* outta *doing just because he thought he owed it to someone? Half my job on the boat was just remindin' him to tone down his damn hero complex."*

That…does sound like Ford. Dipper smiles fondly.

"So, who're you tryin' to do this for?"

That's easy. "Ford," he admits. "And a little bit Mabel, she wanted me to reconsider, but mostly Ford. He'd love their plans for this place."

"An' this is why I always say you're too much like Sixer. Listen up 'cause I don't wanna have this conversation again, got it? It's makin' me itchy," his grunkle groans. *"You don't gotta do anythin' you don't wanna do,* especially *for me or Ford, dead or alive. You think anyone wants ya takin' on a job you're gonna hate? Pull your head outta the dirt, Kid, or else you're gonna waste half your life tryna to prove yourself for no reason."*

That…is suspiciously profound for Grunkle Stan. "Did you finally read one of Mabel's self-help books?" he snickers.

Stan makes an exaggerated retching sound. *"Not on your life. This is a hundred percent old-man, sea wisdom."*

"Sea wisdom?" Dipper laughs. His eyes drift to his desk where a neglected photo of Stan and Ford rests, half-buried behind his stacks of legal paper.

"Does sea wisdom work on land?" he asks, sounding, perhaps, a little more serious than the joke warrants.

Stan barks a laugh. *"You'll be fine."*

He thinks Stan might be right.



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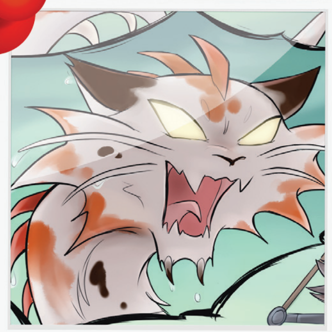
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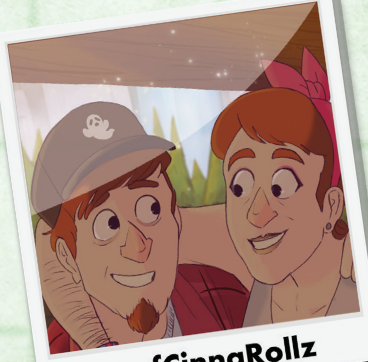
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